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EIU Documentary Details Past Harsh Winters on the Illinois Prairie

Feb-01-2007

Now that winter is making its presence known across the region, it's a great time to look back at how our ancestors braved such harsh conditions on the prairie without modern conveniences.

"An Illinois Winter: A Documentary Film," created by Eastern Illinois University students, details the historic "Winter of the Deep Snow" that impacted the state in 1830-31.

The film will air three times on Consolidated DVS's Channel 13: 7:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 5; 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 15; and 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 27.

The documentary may also be viewed online anytime at <http://www.eiu.edu/~weather/AIW>.

Filmed in part at the Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site near Lerna, the half-hour documentary shows conditions Illinois settlers faced in those very different times, told through weather records and through the words of people who experienced them.

The winter of 1830-31, which dumped several rounds of foot-deep snows and layers of ice, became a badge of honor for those who lived through it.

"Although extreme winter weather is sometimes an inconvenience to us today, we sometimes forget how difficult it was for those before us who had to struggle through the icy nights of central Illinois," said instructor Cameron Craig, who oversaw the documentary's production.

The film is part of the EIU WeatherCenter's ongoing effort to educate the public about Illinois weather – past, current and future.

The documentary has already been viewed by viewers across the nation and overseas, Craig said.

It is also an essential part of the department's mission to give students the best possible practical experience in their chosen field.

"Students need and want experience for their future, and the documentary provided a unique opportunity for broadcast meteorology students to research and present an historical weather event," Craig said.

The film, produced by Tempestas et Caelum Productions, provided practical experience for four students: William Hodor of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Kevin Jeanes of Naperville; Brittney Sager of Charleston; and Laine Sylvester of Bloomington. Even the chair of the department, John Stimac, got involved, giving voice to the writings of an early settler.

Students who are enrolled in EIU's broadcast meteorology program in the departments of geology/geography and communication studies also get practical experience through working with the EIU WeatherCenter, which Craig oversees.

The EIU WeatherCenter's Web site (<http://www.eiu.edu/~weather>) provides current and projected local weather information using a weather station perched above the EIU Physical Science Building.



Kevin Jeanes, broadcast meteorology student at EIU and co-director of "An Illinois Winter," shoots prairie footage for the film.